

Strategic Clinical Networks

Appropriate Use of Antipsychotic Medication in Long Term Care

The Goal

The Appropriate Use of Antipsychotics (AUA) project aims to reduce antipsychotic medication use within long term care (LTC). These medications have been used to manage challenging behaviours of persons with dementia. Risks and side-effects include agitation, confusion, falls, insomnia and sedation, along with increased risk of infection, strokes and cardiac events.

The AUA project helps staff enhance care by focusing on person-centred approaches. Care teams consider each person's unique life story, look for underlying reasons for agitation and address needs. A dementia friendly approach requires families, staff and physicians to work together to investigate and trial approaches to reduce agitation and anxiety.

The Process

The process includes staff education, discussions with family members, and development of resident-specific care plans. A monthly inter-professional medication review tracks, assesses and reduces inappropriate use of these medications.

Resources to support the AUA Project included learning workshops and the AUA Toolkit of resources, available at: www.albertahealthservices.ca/auatoolkit.asp.

The Outcome

In 2013/14, 11 early adopter LTC sites across Alberta reduced antipsychotic use by 50%. As a result of their success, the AUA project was introduced to all 170 Alberta LTC facilities (14,500 beds) in 2014/15.

Currently, 19.8% of Alberta's long-term care residents are using antipsychotic medications (without a chronic mental health condition, as of Quarter 1, 2015-16), surpassing Alberta's goal of 20% by March, 2018. The national average is approximately 30%.

Families are pleased that loved ones are happier, more alert, independent and communicative. LTC teams report residents are calmer, more active and easier to care for. Nine early adopter Supportive Living sites are now trialing the resources; several Acute Care sites are also working to reduce use of antipsychotics.

The Team

The project is led by the Seniors Health Strategic Clinic Network (SCN) in collaboration with Addiction & Mental Health SCN and Zone operations teams. The AUA project team was recently awarded the AHS President's Award for Excellence in Quality Improvement.



"Her eyes began to sparkle, and I could see joy in them again."

- Marshall Bye of his late wife Evelyn, a participant in the AUA project.



The Bye's enjoying a weekly music session, one of the alternative treatments of AUA.